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ABSTRACT

Although an increasing number of young people encounter adversity in their environments, many manage to rebound and live successful lives while others repeat patterns of adversity in their adult lives. Classroom educators and special educators should therefore establish a learning environment that builds resilience in all learners. Educational resilience is defined as "the heightened likelihood of success in school and other life accomplishments despite environmental adversities they face in their environments." There are various criteria and instruments that teachers can use to identify students who are resilient and nonresilient, and to gather data about students' behaviors. After identification and assessment, teachers should consider a variety of strategies that foster resilience in all learners. Six literacy-oriented strategies are: (1) read aloud appropriate children's literature; (2) encourage the selection of a wide variety of authentic literature; (3) give extra support to individuals who experience difficulty selecting appropriate resources; (4) provide time for pleasurable reading and writing; (5) engage learners in interactive activities that help them think about their thinking; and (6) ask questions that stimulate responses from all children. (Contains 18 references and 3 figures of data.) (SR)

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Building Resilience in Literacy Learners

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Although an increasing number of young people encounter adversity in their environments, many manage to rebound and live successful lives while others repeat patterns of adversity in their adult lives (Rutter,1985; Werner & Smith, 1992). This high rate of success represents the positive nature of human development (Benard, 1993), but it also suggests that a substantial minority of children, adolescents, and adults are not leading successful lives. Apparently, these diverse paths—resilient vs. nonresilient—can have a major impact on children and their future.

Promoting resilience in students is therefore an important challenge that classroom teachers and special educators should embrace. Struggling literacy learners, in particular, need extra support as they attempt to achieve success in school regardless of adversities they face in their environments. While becoming literate is a complex process for many children, it can be especially challenging for children who have major demands imposed on their daily lives.

Defining Resilience

According to Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1994, p. 46), educational resilience is "the heightened likelihood of success in school and other life accomplishments despite environmental adversities brought about by early traits, conditions, and experiences." Resilient students demonstrate autonomy, social competence, problem-solving skills, and sense of purpose (Benard,1991), which help them bounce back successfully regardless of exposure to severe risks (Benard, 1993). When students experience hardship or misfortune, however, some are resilient and resolve problems, while others succumb to health-compromising behaviors (Bruce, 1995). Nevertheless, all students benefit from

immersion in a literacy-learning environment that promotes optimal conditions for success. Having positive experiences in literacy is important because it involves opportunities for building social skills, engaging in cooperative problem solving, developing self-confidence, and achieving successfully across the curriculum. This "big-picture" perspective helps students realize they can lead rewarding lives in spite of environmental adversities.

Identifying Resilient and Nonresilient Students

An important aspect of fostering resilience in the literacy program is to identify students who are resilient and nonresilient. Initially, teachers should consider using criteria, such as classroom behavior (very motivated vs. not motivated), academics (high-achieving vs. low-achieving), and attendance (excellent vs. poor) (Padron, Waxman, and Huang, 1999). Then, teachers can administer the My Class Inventory, which is an effective instrument for determining students' perceptions of the learning environment (Dryden & Fraser, 1996; Fraser, Anderson, & Walberg, 1982; Fraser & O'Brien, 1985). This instrument, which consists of 30 items representing five scales, connects well with literacy lessons. The items are read to children who respond with either "Yes" or "No." Figure 1 provides a brief description of the scales with sample items, which are adapted from Padron et al. (1999).

In addition to assessing students' awareness of the learning environment, teachers can systematically gather data about students' behaviors by using the Classroom Observation Schedule (Waxman, Wang, Lindvall, &Anderson, 1988). This instrument is used during instruction as individual students are observed in reference to the following

criteria: a) interactions (e.g., with teacher or students and with instructional or social intent); b) selection of activity (e.g., by the teacher or the student); c) types of activity (e.g., writing, reading, listening, or painting); d) setting (e.g., whole class, small group, paired, or individual); e) manner (e.g. on task or off task); and f) language used (e.g., English, Spanish, or both).

The My Class Inventory and the Classroom Observation Schedule have been found to be valid and reliable. Both instruments are adapted easily to literacy lessons and are useful for providing information about students' resilience or nonresilience. For example, in a recent series of literacy workshops conducted at a Long Island (NY) school district, teachers were trained to use adaptations of both instruments with minority children in grades 3-5 (Sanacore, 2000). The teachers identified resilient and nonresilient learners with criteria, including classroom behavior, academics, and attendance. Then the My Class Inventory and the Classroom Observation Schedule were administered.

> Not surprisingly, the use of these two instruments generated data suggesting that the nonresilient children were more likely to experience decreased satisfaction with classwork and increased difficulty and frustration with learning activities than were the resilient children. Time on task was also a concern, with nonresilient students less focused on instructional tasks than resilient students. (Sanacore, 2000, pp. 241-242)

These and other outcomes of the literacy workshops are similar to the findings of the Padron et al. (1999) study.

Promoting Resilience in All Children

After resilient and nonresilient students have been identified and their classroom behaviors have been assessed, teachers should consider a variety of strategies that foster resilience in all learners. The follow suggestions are not comprehensive, nor are they intended in a linear progression. Rather, they are options to be used strategically in the context of interesting, meaningful literacy instruction.

1. Read aloud children's literature like Margaret Wise Brown's (1977) *The Important Book*, which is an informational storybook about a variety of interesting topics for young readers. Each topic is introduced with a statement, is elaborated with details, and is reinforced with a repetition of the introductory statement. For example, "The important thing about the wind is that it blows. You can't see it, but you can feel it on your cheek, and see it bend trees, and blow hats away, and sail boats. But the important thing about the wind is that it blows." After reading *The Important Book*, the teacher invites children to read their favorite sections, either individually or chorally. Then, the teacher asks open-ended questions, such as "What do you think is important and why?" or "What is the most important thing about you?" Children are free to respond in discussion groups or in writing (e.g., in their literature-response logs).

2. Encourage the selection of a wide variety of authentic literature. In both classroom and special education settings, children profit from a library resource center that consists of large-print books, audiobooks, fiction and nonfiction works, illustrated books, picture books, bibliotherapeutic stories, "big" books, comedies and dramas, poetry anthologies, "how-to" manuals, videotapes, computer software, newspapers, pamphlets, magazines, comics, and dictionaries. Complementing these materials are hardware

adaptations like electronic commnunication aids with voice synthesizers and software products like talking word processors. These and other resources provide opportunities for choice as they facilitate literacy learning for all students (Sanacore, 1997; Sanacore & Wilsusen, 1995).

3. Give extra support to individuals who experience difficulty selecting appropriate resources. Some learners struggle with the process of selecting materials from the library resource center. This struggle is sometimes the result of children not having enough experience making choices or not having their choices respected. Individuals may even lack sufficient spatial orientation and, thus, demonstrate confusion when they attempt to select a book in the maze of many shelved resources. Children who are unable to locate materials that are well-matched with their interests and needs benefit from a sensitive teacher who selects a handful of appropriate materials for them. A smaller number of resources make the selection process manageable, especially when the teacher provides scaffolds that motivate learners to respond interactively to the resources. One such scaffold is called "How to Pick a Book by Hand," a six-step plan suggested by Castle (1994). Figure 2 provides an adapted version of this plan, which the teacher can demonstrate to children who require extra help selecting materials (Sanacore, 1999). Afterward, the children need guided practice in using the plan with a variety of authentic literature. As learners develop confidence making choices, they are gradually weaned from scaffolds and are encouraged to select materials independently.

4. Provide time for pleasurable reading and writing. Teachers should immerse students in books of their choice during sustained silent reading, independent reading, recreational reading, free reading, or voluntary reading. Each day, mixed groups of resilient and

nonresilient children need opportunities to read for pleasure and then to decide how they are going to share this experience. For example, they can a) meet with their teacher for individual or small-group conferences, b) write a letter to a friend describing exciting episodes or important information in their books, c) use technology—e-mail, instant messages, supervised chat rooms, etc.—to communicate with pen pals from other classrooms or schools, d) interview a peer who pretends to be a character in their book, e) join a panel discussion that focuses on the pros and cons of their book, f) act out parts of their stories, and g) become involved in readers' theater. Activities like these build resilience because they motivate literacy learners to make contributions within a non-threatening environment that nurtures individual strengths and interests, encourages (and respects) choice, provides positive feedback, fosters cooperation, and stimulates the lifetime love of learning.

5. Engage learners in interactive activities that help them think about their thinking. Quality literature like Gary Paulsen's (1987) *Hatchet* is an excellent context for enhancing thinking strategies because students are able to identify with the main character's problem-solving strategies. As 13-year-old Brian Robeson is flying in a single-engine plane, the pilot suddenly dies from a heart attack. From that moment, Brian is forced to solve such life-and-death problems as how to land the plane by himself and how to survive in the Canadian wilderness. Throughout this exciting plot, the author reveals not only Brian's problem-solving approaches but also his reasoning processes. Brian thinks in detailed ways concerning pros and cons of different actions, and he reflects on television programs he saw and school activities he experienced to help him survive. While reading and discussing parts of *Hatchet*, the teacher can guide students to

think about how Brian solves problems, including his reasoning approaches. Then, students are asked to pretend they are Brian but to consider different ways of solving the same problems. They also are encouraged to discuss how their thinking is influenced by their feelings and to record these experiences in their diaries or journals. When students are comfortable identifying vicariously with Brian's plight, they are invited to write about an important problem that occurred in their own lives and how they solved it. Since these activities nurture a wide variety of responses, both resilient and nonresilient children are more likely to be active participants as they think about thinking.

6. Ask questions that stimulate responses from all children. Sometimes, nonresilient students do not participate in discussions because the questions that are posed do not invite varied responses. Teachers need to reflect on their questioning strategies and to determine if they are exclusive or inclusive. Questions that exclude are aimed at precise answers given by a limited number of students. Conversely, questions that include "reach out" to all learners and provide opportunities for different responses and rich discussions. Because students are constantly observing and listening to their teachers, the questions that teachers asked may be emulated by students and may become the types of questions that they eventually ask of themselves when engaged in literacy-learning activities. Demonstrating well-planned, inclusive questions is therefore an important instructional responsibility that can encourage active student participation and simultaneously can help students become independent learners. Figure 3 provides examples of exclusive and inclusive questions.

Advocating for Resilience in Literacy Learners

Although most children who experience adversity in their lives manage to bounce back, a substantial minority repeat patterns of misfortune in their adult lives. Classroom teachers and special educators should therefore establish a learning environment that builds resilience in all learners. This positive direction is especially needed in the context of literacy learning because success in literacy usually translates into success across the curriculum. With this solid foundation established, children's chances of having a rewarding school career and lifestyle are increased. To support this thrust, six literacy-oriented strategies are suggested that promote resilience in all learners. Owing to space limitations, other considerations are not highlighted, such as building and activating prior knowledge, connecting skills to meaningful contexts, providing opportunities for readers' and writers' workshop, engaging in the language experience approach, highlighting thematic units, and using portfolios. These and other considerations motivate learner participation during instructional activities as they help all learners develop resilience and lead rewarding lives.

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Figure 1
My Class Inventory: Brief descriptions of the scales with sample items

- Satisfaction: the extent of students' enjoyment of classwork (e.g., I enjoy the schoolwork in my reading class).
- Friction: the amount of tension and quarreling among students (e.g., Some students in my reading class pick on me).
- Competition: the emphasis on students competing with each other (e.g., I try to be first to finish the classwork in reading).
- Difficulty: the extent to which students find difficulty with the work of the class (e.g., In my reading class, the work is hard for me to do).
- Cohesion: the extent to which students know, help, and are friendly toward each other (e.g., In my class, I often work with other students).

Figure 2
Demonstrating an adapted version of "How to Pick a Book by Hand"

The teacher thinks aloud and says,

- I pick a book that I think I can read
- I open to a page near the middle
- I read it to myself
- I hold up a finger for any word I do not know
- I raise four fingers and a thumb to suggest that the book may be too hard
- I repeat the same steps with another page, and if the book is still too difficult, select another one

Figure 3
Examples of exclusive and inclusive questions

- **Exclusive-story events:** In this story, what are the three important decisions that the main character had to make? (Only students who know all three decisions are invited to respond.)
- **Inclusive-story events:** In this story, the main character had to make three important decisions. Who can discuss one of them? Then, who can discuss another one? Finally, who would like to talk about another important decision that the main character had to make? (Students who know one or more of the decisions are invited to respond.)
- **Exclusive-content-area sequence:** In this chapter, what are the three important battles of the war and the order in which they occurred? (Only students who know all three battles in sequential order are invited to respond.)
- **Inclusive-content-area sequence:** In this chapter, the author presents three important battles of the war. Who can discuss the first battle? Then, who can discuss the second battle? Finally, who would like to talk about the third battle of the war? (Students who are comfortable discussing one or more of the battles are invited to respond.)
- **Exclusive-cause and effect:** In this article, what are the major causes of the war? What are the major effects of the war? (Students are limited by confusion concerning such words as *major, minor, causes* and *effects*. Also, some students may think that only those with knowledge of all causes and effects should respond.)
- **Inclusive-cause and effect:** In this article, locate cause and effect relationships in the statements listed below. If the cause is stated in the left column, give the effect in the

right column. If the effect is stated in the right column, give the cause in the left column. (Students are more likely to be confident responding to prompting statements. Also, students who are aware of one or more of the causes and effects are invited to respond.)

- **Exclusive-problem-solution:** In this article, what is the problem that is presented and what are the solutions that are suggested? (Only students who can locate a problem-solution structure embedded in expository text are able to respond. Also, students may think that they must know all aspects of the problem and solution in order to respond.)
- **Inclusive-problem-solution:** In this article, let's try to find an important problem that the author presents. The teacher then guides the class to focus on essential signaling words that he or she already underlined, such as *problem, for example,* and *also.* Afterward, the teacher guides students to locate the solutions to the problem by focusing on related signaling words, including *solution, first, second,* and *third.* (Signaling words provide a scaffold for understanding and responding to discussions about the challenging problem-solution structure.)
- **Exclusive-response to text:** In this story, who is the main character? What problem did the main character face? When did this problem occur? Where did this problem occur? (These basic questions tend to support a literal level of understanding. Because they promote a boring discussion, less students are apt to participate.)
- **Inclusive-response to text:** In this story, think beyond the ideas and events that are presented. If you were the main character, how would you have approached the problem? What would you have learned about yourself from your approach to the

problem? What difficulties would you have encountered as you attempted to solve the problem? What would you have learned about yourself from the ways in which you handled these difficulties? Would you have dealt with the problem successfully? Why? (These questions foster personal responses. Because no right or wrong answers are required, students are motivated to share their responses.)

- **Exclusive-time:** The teacher asks questions, quickly redirects the questions to other students, or rephrases the questions. (This quick pacing of questions prevents some students from reflecting and then responding. Only students with a rapid or impulsive way of thinking are able to participate in related discussions.)

- **Inclusive-time:** The teacher poses questions and then provides sufficient wait time—at least three seconds. (Increasing wait time provides opportunities for more children to engage in reflection, elaboration, and higher-level thinking. This positive context builds self-esteem as it stimulates a variety of responses from a diversity of learners.)